

Something Strange

by Spirit Dragon

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Summary: When there's something strange in the neighbourhood, who do you call? [Rating may go up.] (Review if you wish to join) So the mall's zombie central. What else is new? (Happy birthday sYn)

1. Default Chapter

(When there's) Something Strange

>
... in the neighbourhood. Who do ya call?

>
In this case, not the Ghostbusters.

>
Disclaimer: The Counter-Strike series does not belong to me.

>
Never thought I'd ever get down to writing this. As always.

Anyway, this is about an extermination team that does, well, jobs too big for normal exterminators.

>
Review/email me if you want to join the fic, only two vacancies have been taken.

>
Squad Leader: Headshot (my ever-faithful reviewer and friend)

>Rifleman #1: Rifleman #2:
Sniper #1: Kesenai (me)

>Sniper #2:
Machine Gunner:

>
Actually, I'm not so sure whether we can fill up all the vacancies in the first place... if more want to join I can increase the size of the team.

>

>
The truck thundered down the bumpy road at high speed, much to the dismay of its cargo.

>
"Hey!" screamed a SWAT officer, pounding on the metal wall separating him from the driver. "We ain't inanimate objects here!"

>
His reply came in the form of a laugh. "Thanks for the encouragement," the driver said, slamming the pedal to the floor.

>
The rest of the SWAT team tumbled over each other in a heap of weapons.

>
They'd never gotten an assignment like this before. Some

gibberish about "aliens, attacking everything in sight, need SWAT team". So basically they were there to prove that there were no aliens, especially in a shopping mall in the middle of nowhere.

>
As a result they were packed into the back of a truck and driven through a baking desert. Why did they have to send the SWAT team for something so small? And their superiors had armed them to the teeth, with M-16A1 rifles, grenades, Kevlar vests... why would they be so foolish as to believe this?

>
But they had no time to debate over this, for they had reached their destination.

>
They spilled out of the back, all eight team members, weapons gleaming in the sunlight, which beat down mercilessly on everyone's backs. With considerable reluctance, the team put on their goggles and set off into the mall.

>

>
The first thing that hit them was the stench.

>
"What the..." one whispered, pointing a gloved finger at the wall.

>
A fresh spattering of blood.

>
And underneath it, a disemboweled body in a fresh pool of the same substance, features twisted in a grimace of horror.

>
On full alert, the team swept the area with the barrels of their weapons.

>
Nothing.

>
"Split up, team," the leader ordered, trying to hold back a fresh wave of nausea.

>
And so in two teams of four, the SWAT team scouted the area for evidence of the so-called "aliens".

>

>
Nothing seemed to be amiss, until the officer peeking around the corner flew backwards with a scream, and started thrashing around wildly.

>
A yellow crab had attached itself to his face.

>
Or what looked like a yellow crab.

>
It was a bulbous orb with four spindly legs, and it seemed to be enveloping his head rapidly, paying no attention to the screams emanating from within it.

>
The rest were petrified.

>
Finally, the body ceased all movement, and what used to be an officer crashed to the floor.

>
What got up, however, was a mutilated mass.

>
"What the he--"

>
The creature let out a high-pitched moan and advanced, rather slowly, towards the team.

>
They snapped out of their trances.

>
"OPEN FIRE!"

>
The zombie was ripped apart by a hail of lead. Screaming wildly, it fell heavily, blood spurting from the wound in its chest.

>
Its trajectory was rather strange though. As it fell, the body buckled at the back, and it fell off the second-floor railing, hitting the ground floor with a squishy _thud_.

>
The officers stared down at what used to be a comrade.

>
But they whirled around and saw a wave of the creatures moving slowly but steadily towards them...

>

>
Team Two had a similar experience.

>
Theirs came in the form of another creature that moved rather

strangely, its long frighteningly clawed arms flailing from side to side. Its skeletal figure looked deranged.

>
At least, it looked deranged until it attacked.

>
Then the officers made the decision that it was deranged.

>
Its claws tore through a man's Kevlar vest like a hot knife through butter, his ribcage shattering along with it. Blood splattered on the floor as he stared, dazed, at his own heart beating feebly on the floor. His whole body followed soon after.

>
Another's .45 magnum shots landed just fractions of seconds too late as the zombie nimbly leaped from support to support. As it made the final jump, the man's pistol ran out of ammunition.

>
The claws raked his skull, straight through his head protection, and hot blood filled the remains of his helmet. He collapsed, surrounded by a pool of his own lifeblood.

>
The remaining two officers opened fire with their assault rifles and pistols, but to no avail.

>
Claws slicing through legs, both dropped to the floor, only to be impaled by their foe's sharp weapons.

>
Team Two was down.

>

>
Team One's job wasn't a walk in the park either. The zombies were more resilient than they thought, and already one had succumbed to another of the crabs. Grenades proved to be effective, but the two remaining men had already used up their supply, and their ammunition was running dry.

>
Soon both were down to knives.

>
One was overrun quickly, his screams muffled by the mob of moaning creatures.

>
As the last one plunged his weapon into another zombie, another of the pesky crabs landed on his head, blocking out the sight of his enemies.

>
Its gaping mouth covered his face, suffocating him. Acids dissolved his goggles and went straight through his eyes, sending pain shooting through him. Mucus clogged up his nose and mouth, cutting off his air.

>
Trying to judge where his adversary was, he positioned his knife over his head. Unfortunately, he did not know that headcrabs were thin creatures.

>
And it only occurred to him as he plunged the knife inward with all his might, piercing through the headcrab and straight into his face.

>

>
Meanwhile, the driver was not in the least bit concerned about the fates of his friends. They were SWAT; they'd be fine. So, he continued blasting the stereo with heavy metal music and eating sour cream and onion potato chips.

>
There was a loud _thunk!_ on the back of his truck, and he jerked upwards, momentarily distracted.

>
Crash!

>
The source of the noise had moved towards the cabin, and landed on the windshield. Its grinning face leered at him.

>
The driver resisted the urge to scream. It was actually true. There were aliens.

>
"H-Hhh-Hello..." he said slowly and cautiously, his voice cracking, reaching under the dashboard for his M3 Super 90 shotgun. In moments, he'd have that thing riddled with buckshot holes.

>
And then the strangest thing happened.

>
"Hello!" the undead zombie shrieked shrilly, plunging its claws through the windshield.
>

>
Well, how did ya like the first chappie? I thought it was kinda gory, so maybe I should move it to the R section.
>
Remember, R&R if ya wanna join!

2. Enter the Exterminators

Something Strange

>
Well. I need more people to join this fic, otherwise I'll stick with (spoiler).
>
Team Leader: Headshot Rifleman 1: ?
>Rifleman 2: ?
Sniper 1: Kesenai Sniper 2: sYn (yay)
>Machine Gunner: Meatwad (yay!)

>Hmm... that was a gratifying response for a first fic. I guess it wasn't too bad, 4 reviews.

>Look out for the Hallowe'en fic from this series.

>Chapter 2: Enter the Exterminators

>---

>"Crap."

>That was the first word that came out of the deputy's mouth when he saw the scene of carnage. And what he saw was only the outside of the mall.

>"Sir."

>He heard a voice by his side and turned to face a rather pale police officer.

>"Yes, ah... Johnson?" he asked, reading the nametag on the officer's shirt.

>Johnson fidgeted nervously. "Sir... maybe you'd like to see the inside of the truck... I'm not sure whether we can handle this."

>The deputy was rather reluctant, not knowing what to expect, but he followed anyway.

>As they reached the shattered windscreen, Johnson blanched, and the deputy fought back nausea.

>Blood was dripping steadily off the remains of the plexiglass. Johnson's eyes widened, and he staggered off, not wanting to see any more.

>"Johnson-- Johnson..." he called, but the policeman was gone, most likely to empty the contents of his stomach in a secluded spot.

>The deputy sighed, placed a boot on the bumper, and heaved himself up.

>Flies... there was a mass of them swarming on the driver's seat. The deputy frowned. Why would flies be landing on wool? Plus, there was a terrible stench.

>Sweeping the swarm away, they just came back. Finally, tired of attempting to disperse the crazed insects, he heaved himself into the front passenger seat.

>And wished he hadn't.

>His bottom landed with a squelch in a pool of blood. Now he noticed that the red liquid covered practically everything, steering wheel, dashboard, ignition... and the smell of rotting meat grew steadily stronger.

>Covering his nose with one hand, he flapped madly at the scavenging flies, and he had the second regret within two minutes.

>The driver was dead. Not just dead. Pulverised.

>One eye was sealed shut, and the other a bloody mass. One cheek was

torn totally off, revealing the still-raw muscle and a flash of white bone. A hand was under the dashboard, the other hanging on by a few tendons. His legs were broken in strange ways, oddly disjointed. And his throat...?
>

He had no throat, replaced by a rapidly-forming pool of blood.
<

>The deputy had no control over himself and was violently sick on the corpse, increasing the happiness of the flies. They came back in droves, swarming over their meal.
<

>Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he stumbled out of the cab and slid to the desert sand.
<

>Two SWAT team members approached him cautiously. "Sir... are you alright?"
<

>His eyes staring at the building, the deputy replied, "Yeah... but I wonder if the guys inside are."
<

>---<

>"We got a job to do," a figure said, standing up from his swivel chair and giving a whoop, the computer monitor glowing bright green in the darkness.
<

>Another one gave him a high-five, and yet another couldn't keep a smile off his face. "Get us suits for four," he ordered.
<

>The second person nodded, and dashed off through a door.
<

>"Wouldn't it be better to consult them first?" the first one asked, slightly concerned.
<

>"They wouldn't give us the job if they knew who we were," the last one replied, his smile turning into a devilish grin.
<

>---<

>The zombie hid within the back of the truck, lying perfectly still.
<

>It heard noises outside, and if it could have, its ears would have perked up.
<

>However, its ears had since rotted away, but it could still hear perfectly.
<

>No matter. It would wait for the perfect opportunity, then strike...
<

>---<

>"Have you checked the back of the truck?"
<

>"No," the deputy replied. "What for anyway?"
<

>"Well," the policeman said with a shrug of his shoulders, "maybe for a sample, or..." his voice trailed off lamely.
<

>"Well, if you insist..." the deputy said, turning to the double metal doors of the truck.
<

>---<

>The humans were coming. The zombie could hear the footsteps of the humans on the gravel...
<

>---<

>With a metallic clank, the metal doors swung open.
<

>The deputy flew at least two metres as the zombie crashed into his chest with a screech, claws fully extended.
<

>The zombie leered at the deputy and raised a hand, poised to strike...
<

>---<

>There were two shots, and the zombie exploded into green goop before the trembling deputy.
<

>Heads turned, and a teenage girl holding a sniper rifle stared back at them, along with a green van behind her.
<

>"What," she asked innocently, "did I do something wrong?"
<

>There was a whistle and a slam as the driver got out, closing the

door behind him. "Dang it sYn, I don't know whether I coulda made that shot, G3SG1 or Arctic."

>The back doors of the van were flung open, and two more got out.
"You fools, you forgot to introduce yourselves!"

>"Excuse me..." the recovered-from-extreme-trauma deputy said hesitantly, raising a hand.

>"You're the leader! You should be the one doing that!" the driver said, throwing his hands up.

>"You're the one usually first out of the van! You should do that!" the presumed-leader said, frowning at the driver.

>"I think we look kinda odd standing around here bickering," the girl said nervously, looking around at the crowd of policemen.

>And so they did.

>"Pardon me, but I believe you kids should leave. This is a restricted area," the deputy said, lowering his hand.

>"Leave! I just saved your frickin' life! And you want us to leave! Some kinda welcoming party you guys are!" the girl screamed, raising the rifle.

>"Yes, and I'm grateful for that, but you children are carrying around firearms illegally," the deputy said, staring down the barrel of the gun nervously. "Again, this is a restricted area."

>The G3SG1 gave a stony click of the safety being taken off, but the presumed-leader produced a folded sheet of paper from his shirt-pocket, and gave it to the deputy, whose forehead creased in confusion.

>"S.W.A.T. Exterminators? What the heck?" he questioned, scratching his head.

>"You haven't heard of us?" the driver asked, his face falling.

>"Heck no! Who the heck are you?" the deputy almost screamed.

>"The people stopping your butts totally being kicked by aliens," the leader said matter-of-factly.

>The deputy opened his mouth to say something sarcastic, but the leader cut him off. "With the weapons and the amount of training your guys have in there, they are most likely dead or turned into zombies."

>"Zombies? I'm allergic to bull crap," the deputy scoffed.

>"Get the suits ready," the leader turned to the unnamed guy (very tall), who nodded and went into the back of the van.

>"Wait a second! What the heck are you doing?"

>The leader turned back to the deputy. "Give us one chance. We'll exterminate these guys, and bring back your fallen comrades."

>The deputy said nothing, but he turned back to the rest of the policemen. "Clear the area, and let them move in."

>The leader tapped him on the shoulder.

>"I need two of your men. Brave, smart, and streetwise, preferably. Two of my people are on leave today..."

>---

>The team and the two SWAT team members were sitting in the van, which was more spacious than it looked. It was hard to believe that the two members consented to join them at all.

>If only it weren't crowded with all sorts of technology.

>"Let's introduce ourselves, shall we?" the leader said easily.

>The team members showed no reaction.

>The leader beckoned to the brown-haired girl.

>"First up, sYn. She's the first sniper of our unit, and she likes to work alone. She prefers that there are no distractions in her shooting, and don't get in her way. You will definitely regret it. She is also our team armorer, the maker of all our weapons.

>The leader then pointed to the tall, muscular Asian.

>"That's Dargon, the first rifleman in our unit. He's skilled with every weapon, all except for Lapua Magnum's A.I. Arctic Warfare, which he detests. Never underestimate his strength and courage in a firefight."

>The leader nudged the driver.

>"This is Kesenai, the second sniper, old fart and worrywart of our team. He is paranoid, and prefers to have some company. However, he is the co-founder of S.W.A.T, and he can shoot the head off a pin from two hundred metres. He's our weapons designer."

>The leader pointed to himself.

>"Last but not least, my name is Headshot. I am the founder of S.W.A.T, and I haven't really got much to say about myself--"

>"How about big ego?" Kesenai piped up. There were snickers from the rest of the team.

>Headshot shot him a dirty look.

>"Well, there really isn't much to say about me, except that I'm the leader, and I boss the rest of them around. Hahahahaha!"

>It was the rest of the team's turn to shoot him a dirty glare.

>"Well... now that that's done, shall we get suited up?"

>---

>End Chapter 2!

>Sorry about the boring chappie, but the next one will just be about equipment. Then AFTER that the action will start.

>-starts dodging tomatoes- Aww shiz!! <div>

3. Bringing out the Big Guns

Something Strange

Sorry some people who requested to join won't actually appear until the end of this "saga". I have everything planned out... maybe you will come in about Chapter 5? Maybe.

So far Headshot is Squad Leader, Dargon is Rifleman 1, Master (from the Master and Chief team) is Rifleman 2, Kesenai is Sniper 1, sYn is Sniper 2, and Meatwad is the Machine Gunner.

All filled up. Nicely.

This chapter is all about the hardware that the team uses... you can skip it, but there are a few important terms that you need to know. Which are, undoubtedly, in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Bringing out the Big Guns

"What equipment are you guys using, anyway?" Headshot asked, as the rest flipped open various compartments behind him.

"Kevlar vest and helmet, M-16A1 assault rifle with six magazines apiece, and SOCOM Mark-23 sidearms with four magazines of .45 ACP slugs," one said, raising his eyebrow. "It's enough, isn't it?"

"It's your funeral," Headshot shrugged, turning away. "You want absolute protection against those things we're up against, you need one of these."

Dargon produced a huge suit of what looked like full plate armor, except that it was black and seemed to absorb light. It looked rather like an armored spacesuit, but it had an angular helmet, most likely from the amount of armor plating on it. Its faceplate was a reflective green.

(Dang it... just take the MJOLNIR armor from Halo and change the colors. I drew a funny-looking sketch of this and realised that it looked almost exactly like it.)

The officers were speechless.

"_Damn_, that is overkill," one muttered after several moments' silence. "But how do you fit into that thing? It's seven feet tall."

"Shrinks to fit your size. Ingenious, eh? Anyway, presenting the FLAMBERGE armor, modelled after the MJOLNIR from the game Halo. Now... with that kind of popularity, I suppose you've played it," Headshot said proudly, patting its chest plate. "Parts scrounged up by Meatwad, designed by Kesenai, and made by sYn."

"Kid, we don't play video games. And what kinda name is Meatwad?"

"Well... never mind about that. Don't underestimate Meatwad... and the same goes for the rest of my team. I'd get him to show you his skills, just that he and Master are off on a holiday right now," the team leader said, shrugging again, and shooting both men a look that said quite plainly, "_Don't ask about the name._"

"We're moving in as soon as possible, but before that we'll have a briefing. All shopping malls have basically the same layout, so we don't really need to go over that. What's important, however, are the functions of the FLAMBERGE and the things you're up against, which will be a minimal threat compared to what we usually do," he continued.

The rest of the team got out their own armor, but they didn't put it on. They all sat in a semi-circle in front of a projector screen that Headshot pulled down. sYn adjusted a mini-projector.

"How do you fit all this stuff into a little van like this?" a SWAT operator asked.

"Dunno; ask sYn. She does to this van whatever I request, and it comes out fine, if a little cramped. There's a Dune Buggy in the trunk that we assemble sometimes, you know," Headshot said, enjoying the looks of awe on the two seniors' faces. He took out a telescopic pointer and extended it to its full length.

"Now, we need to know your names," Headshot said, whipping the pointer back and forth.

"John," one said.

"Stewart," said the other.

Headshot nodded, and turned his attention to the projection.

A picture of what looked like a yellow blob on red spindly legs appeared on the screen, and at the side was a video clip of the little yellow blob in action. It leaped high into the air, emitting a high-pitched screech from a hole (presumably its mouth) in its bottom, then it was promptly sliced into three pieces by a Nautilus combat knife.

"Courtesy of Kesenai," Headshot told them. "This, is what we call a headcrab," he said, pointing at the yellow blob. "True to the name, they fit their fanged mouths over human heads, and turn them into zombies," he continued, gesturing to sYn, who clicked something on the projector.

"Mine," Headshot said.

The image changed to a bloody, deformed human body with a headcrab replacing its head. Long, serrated claws replaced its hands. The video clip showed an MP7 being drawn, then fired at its head. Green liquid spurted out of its head every time the stream of bullets made contact. It let out an unearthly moan, then sliced at its attacker, who jumped backwards, then fired a burst from the Heckler and Koch into the zombie's chest. The zombie let out another scream, fell backwards onto the floor, and the strangest thing happened.

The mutilated headcrab slithered off its host's head with a squelchy pop, revealing a slimy and blood-covered head. The headcrab hissed, leaped, and was blown apart by the submachinegun's fire.

Headshot's face was grim. "You can't save them. A headcrab can't be removed without severe bodily harm-- trying will either result in the fangs tearing through some arteries and nerves, or worse yet, the head will be removed from the neck.

"When a headcrab leaps onto a person's head, it uses a sort of glue that only it can dissolve. Then it injects a poison that renders the person unconscious and paralysed, and fills the cavities of the body with a natural embalming fluid. The hands harden, fuse together, and sharpen into claws as a result of the fluid. When the victim regains consciousness, it will no longer be in control of its body. That realisation will only last for a split-second, for after that the victim will only have a desire to kill.

"In the event that the headcrab leaves the body, the mind will regain control of the body. The fluid will still remain, leaving the victim somewhat paralysed (the effect having been neutralised somewhat by the headcrab's disengaging) but the victim will realise that death is imminent. For the next few remaining seconds of the host's life, the human body's impulse is to scream.

"Also, the host's survival depends on the headcrab as well. If the headcrab dies, the human does as well. But kill the human, and the

headcrab lives to fight-- at least for the next few seconds. Really, you need a cold heart to do this kind of thing. It may seem morbid, but if you really must kill a zombie, aim for the head. End the host's suffering."

(A/N: _Dang,_ but I think I did a good job on that explanation. Not to be egoistical.)

Ignoring the two operators' shocked expressions, Headshot motioned with his hand, and sYn clicked another button. This time, two different kinds of headcrabs appeared on screen. One looked like a normal headcrab, just thinner and had longer legs. The other had a more crab-like body and was a sickly green speckled with white spots, with orange legs.

"The leaper and poison headcrabs. Leaper headcrabs act the same way, but they turn their victims into fast, or leaper zombies. The embalming fluid doesn't stiffen the body as much, but it dissolves the skin by threading little tunnels to the pores, then letting the fluid spill from the pores all over the skin. What is left, is an agile, monkey-like zombie.

"Poison headcrabs, however, are a different matter. The poison and fluid take almost the same effect as the leaper headcrab, but the poison is more concentrated, and causes the body to swell into a burly figure. The embalming fluid, in this case, after dissolving the skin, it has a certain type of pheromone that attracts other poison headcrabs.

"Poison headcrabs have several poison glands. Four around their legs, and two around their mouths, making a total of six poison glands on a headcrab. A slash or bite to even the armor will bring you to a dangerous condition of internal bleeding. The FLAMBERGE will administer an antivenin to counteract the poison and stop the bleeding, but during this time, you are prone to enemy attack as you are very weak."

sYn clicked the projector again, and this time it showed a Sig Sauer P228 emptying its .357 slugs into a gangly zombie. It had no skin, only muscles and bones. Each time a slug hit, the unprotected zombie would jerk backwards, screaming horrifically. Once seven slugs had shattered its ribcage and tore horrific holes in its remaining flesh and muscles, the zombie slumped to the floor, and an armored boot crushed the attempting-to-escape leaper headcrab underfoot.

"sYn did that one," Headshot said. "The next one is Dargon's."

At another click, a CAR-15 blasted 12-gauge shells from the shotgun underneath its primary barrel, the pellets ramming into another skinless, slime-dripping zombie. The zombie promptly reached behind its back, and hurled a poison headcrab at its attacker. The headcrab was shredded by a stream of 5.56 bullets, and another shotgun blast to the head dropped the zombie with a heavy thud. An armored hand picked up the other poison headcrab which had scampered off the zombie when it died, and smashed it against the wall. The headcrab dropped to the floor, lifeless. A kick from Dargon sent it flying for good measure.

The last click brought up a black screen. sYn shut off the projector, and Kesenai yanked on the string, folding the screen up.

"That's it," Headshot said, rubbing his hands. "That should be all you need to know. I won't explain the suit functions since we're running out of time. John, you'll stand in for Meatwad today as Machine Gunner, and Stewart will be our secondary Rifleman, to replace Master for today. Stewart, you're going with Kesenai, and John will be with me. Dargon, go with sYn. We'll draw out the zombies and headcrabs, and the two snipers will pick them off. But exterminate all those on your level first.

"John and I will be Team Alpha, sYn and Dargon will be team Gamma, and Kesenai and Stewart will be Team Beta. Let's outfit you with your weapons and whatnot..."

Team Alpha

"Ok, John, let's get cracking. This is your weapon," Headshot said, producing a light machine gun. "The M249 Squad Automatic Weapon, or Squad Assault Weapon. SAW for short." He also gave John four box-like bullet containers. "It's pretty heavy, but it can lay waste in a matter of seconds. 100 rounds per magazine, if you call it that."

Headshot then hefted the FLAMBERGE, which promptly came apart for convenience. There was the helmet, the chest, the two arms, and the two legs.

"Lose the vest and helmet," Headshot advised. "Otherwise it's gonna be pretty tight, and it's gonna be hot as Hades."

John did as he was told, then put the legs on first.

"It's still darned loose," he complained.

"Gotta put it all on first," Headshot said, helping John put the chest part on, followed by the arms, and finally the helmet.
"Now--"

John felt as though the armor had flowed across his skin as Headshot uttered that one word. It was very comfortable the next moment, if a bit hot.

"Sorry," Headshot said, shrugging. "There is a coolant in the suit, but hang on-- the suit's analysing you first. There will be a moment of discomfort..."

The SWAT operator yelped as several tiny needles from the suit's rubber-like interior pierced straight through his clothes and into his skin, firmly bonding him to the suit. It wasn't painful since the needles were so small-- but he felt like his whole body had just gone numb. A moment later, the numbness subsided, but John felt like he was walking in a big swimming suit.

"'S not that bad once you get used to it," Headshot said, putting his own armor on. "Here's the rest of your arsenal. Keep the SOCOM, it's a good weapon. Take this, though... it's a Heckler and Koch MP5SD. Silenced, yet powerful submachinegun. There's a built-in holster for it, don't worry."

The team leader picked up his own Heckler and Koch MP7, Clarion FAMAS and Israeli Magnum Industries Desert Eagle .50.

"Let's meet up with the rest," he suggested, and both walked to the other side of the van, where the other four were.

Team Beta

"Look, don't give me any crap and I won't give you any crap either. Just follow my orders and we won't fight, ok?"

Those were the first words Kesenai spoke to Stewart, who naturally was irked about getting that from a kid, but he nodded.

"Stick with your weapons-- cancel that, gimme that M-16," the sniper said to his partner, who handed his weapon over.

"Keep the SOCOM and the SEAL knife, they're decent. But take this Steyr AUG. More knockdown power than that old M-16. Six magazines, and 30 rounds per clip, plus a sight combined with the carrying handle. Now, put on the armor."

They pretty much went through the same process as Headshot and John, just with a lot more cursing from Kesenai.

But they got ready pretty much on time.

The three teams met up at the front of the van.

"Guys... don't bring shame to this team. We don't wanna make a bad impression. This is a milk run. Run in, shoot the baddies, bring out the jackpot, which is in this case, their fallen comrades," Headshot said, jabbing a finger at the two now decked-out SWAT operators.

"I... I just don't want anyone to get into trouble. You're the best that I have, and the best that I'll ever have, most likely. If any one of us dies, remember that you'll be remembered eternally as a good person," Headshot said, looking at the members of his team-- at least the original members.

He looked up, and everyone knew that he was grinning, even though they couldn't see it. "All right, lady and gentlemen, that's enough, let's go kick some alien ass."

And so they set off towards the mall.

I love that line, seriously. I'm talking about the one Headshot said just now. Anyway, read and review please! Reviews make me happy-- even those that flame. Still, don't flame. I beg you. They give me a significantly less degree of happiness.

4. Shooting in Style

Something Strange

The alien butt-kicking begins! Headshot should be happy. Heck, not just him. I should say all who regularly read this fic.

Medico and Reaper, you have been accepted, but you won't be in for quite a while. Don't worry... you'll show up eventually.

There won't be too much action in this chapter (it's supposed to be a milk run), but in the next "saga", there will definitely be.

Arh, there shouldn't be a need for too long an introduction. Enjoy the fight scenes. (finally!)

Chapter 4: Shooting In Style

* * *

>The team loved theatrics, as John and Stewart could see. Dargon put two rounds into the panes of glass on the automatic doors (now no longer automatic) with his USP Elite, the result being two spiderweb-like cracks in the panes. Headshot smashed them open with the butt of his FAMAS, and the team leaped inside.<p><p>

It was more quiet than they expected; maybe a few moans echoing in the empty mall, but that was it. Bloodstains were splattered onto the walls along with some yellow fluid that looked almost too mysterious to mention. Two zombies lay against a pillar, and puddles of fluid mixed with blood were forming where they rested.

It was the first time John and Stewart were actually seeing a zombie. John walked tentatively towards the prostrate form, only to be roughly yanked backward by Dargon.

sYn fired twice, one round into each zombie's skull. They groaned and slumped even further down, and the undead were dead. Again.

Headshot strode forward and probed the first one with his foot, and got no response. He beckoned, and the team strode forward cautiously.

It was even more grotesque than they had thought. It looked human, at least, if you didn't look at the hands or head. Then again, it had lost too much blood to even be physically possible.

Stewart prodded the turkey-shaped object on the zombie's head. "Do all headcrabs look like this?"

"Not all the time," the team leader replied, not looking at him, but his eyes still scanning the upper levels of the mall. "They expand to accommodate human heads. Not much is known about these alien fauna, and surprisingly one of the most mysterious is the headcrab.

"They manage to evolve to mutate humans, yet they have no humans on their home planet at least, that's what we think."

Repeated gunfire was heard, and the team swivelled to see Kesenai taking out three revived zombies with his dual Mini-Uzis. "We'd

better go, sir," he said, casting a glance at the corpses that lay a few metres from him. "They'll overwhelm us if we stay here."

"Roger that," Headshot nodded. "All right. Split up, team!"

Team Gamma and Beta sprinted to the second floor, while Team Alpha moved forward.

"Status check," the squad leader ordered.

"sYn reporting in, sir. Alien presence is negative. Awaiting orders, sir."

"Kesenai reporting in, sir. Alien presence is minimal."

"Dargon reporting in, sir. Alien presence is negative. Awaiting orders, sir."

The thunderous report of a .50BMG echoed throughout the building's four walls, and two zombies dropped. Another pair followed soon after.

"Alien threat removed, sir," Kesenai said tersely. "Awaiting orders."

Headshot paused for a while, then clicked his mike back on. "Gamma, provide covering fire for us. Beta, remove all alien threats on the upper levels. Move it!"

"Aye sir!"

"Yes sir!"

"I'm on 'em."

Headshot turned to John. "Let's see what they got."

No sooner had he said that than a fast zombie came screaming down from the third floor, claws outstretched.

* * *

>Obviously, it never even made contact with Headshot. A 7.62 millimetre round swiftly came earthward, severing the head not-quite-so cleanly from the shoulders. Stepping aside, Headshot stared at the trajectory of the undead body as it made contact with the floor with a muffled thump. The head whistled down a millisecond later, splattering the SWAT operator with blood.<p><p>

sYn surveyed her handiwork, her G3 still smoking. "I'd like to see Kesenai top _that_," she said with satisfaction, eyeing the clean bullet hole.

"Just watch me," the other sniper snorted, his voice crackling over the headset.

Another thunderous blast came from the floor above her, and there was a spat curse, followed by the thump of a zombie hitting the ground, and the clicking of an AWP being rebolted. "Crap. Lemme try again."

"Maintain radio silence," Headshot said, and they could visualise his frown even though they couldn't see it. "And stop these stupid contests already... you're going to get someone killed."

"Aye sir," Kesenai sighed, and slung his rifle over his back, pulling out his Glock-20 to dispatch some zombies that were drawing nearer.

"Spoilsport," sYn mumbled under her breath, before clicking her mike back on. "Yes sir."

* * *

>(Team Beta)<p><p>

Stewart squeezed the trigger of his rifle steadily, pouring lead into the few zombies in front of him. It was quite a lot easier than fighting terrorists, or criminals for that matter. They just stumbled straight into his line of fire.

They had incredible natural resilience, however; if he aimed anywhere except for the head, it took a long time to take them down, maybe six to seven bullets compared to the three headshots.

They were crouched in the corner, and since there was no need for cover (the zombies had no ranged attacks) they merely crouched or stood, guns blazing away.

But they almost overwhelmed the duo at one point of time; Kesenai's sniper rifle had jammed while the SWAT operator was reloading. The sniper's Uzis were relatively slow-firing, but still powerful. As luck would have it, however, Stewart forgot to bolt his AUG in his panic.

They'd gotten out of that mess when Kesenai dropped an Uzi to draw his Glock, and Stewart finally realised that hadn't cocked it.

The kid was good; he was a teenager and he handled that huge rifle like a pro. Of course, the other girl was better, but her gun was of a smaller caliber, only 7.62 millimetre.

Of course, he'd never doubted the firepower of Heckler and Koch weapons, but the Arctic's half-inch slug delivered quite a blow to anything in its path. And anything behind it.

It had actually gotten quite monotonous after that one incident with the unbolted Steyr, until there was a sound of a cross between a monkey's angered screech and the howl of a wolf, followed by several others.

All firing stopped in an instant.

Sounds of rapid movement on metal echoed throughout the building. Stewart squinted. He'd heard that noise before.

And so had Kesenai, apparently, because he barely gave Stewart time to turn away from the blast before he pointed his rifle at the ceiling, and pulled the trigger.

There was an enraged scream, and the dying form of... well, something, crashed out of the air duct and plummeted down to the ground floor.

Then the operator knew... it was one of those things. The same type of zombie that had attacked Deputy McPherson, those long, lanky, seemingly-frail zombies.

"Kesenai!" Headshot's voice came over the headset.

"Sir!"

"Take care of those leapers and get Stewart to cover you. Those things are nothing but trouble, so get 'em off our backs! I've got sYn working on it already."

"Affirmative, sir!"

Taking out a last zombie with a clean headshot from his Glock-20, Kesenai hefted his rifle, and reloaded it.

"Stick to me like glue," he said as he pulled the bolt back, and sprinted towards the railing, aiming his rifle downwards.

Peering through the scope, the sniper saw sYn's G3SG1 bucking against her shoulder as she took out fast zombies as soon as they came down. Dargon was keeping the lumbering corpses away from her with his USP Elite and an occasional 5.56 millimetre burst.

Twirling the dials on his scope swiftly, he pulled the trigger and ejected the casing, not even taking his eye away from the scope. He fired again and again, a slight growl rising in his throat as he relentlessly sent zombie after zombie flying with the force of his bullets.

He had to stop after five shots to reload, and Kesenai did it in less than three seconds, dropping the empty magazine and slotting a new one in, his free hand moving upwards to yank the bolt.

Without even bringing the rifle into firing position, another zombie was made into a gruesome ragdoll.

* * *

>(Team Alpha)<p><p>

Headshot blasted another zombie into assorted pieces with the last shot from his Desert Eagle. His MP7 was up in one hand and blazing as he reloaded, blood flying from the unshielded monkey-like zombies.

That was the only benefit of fighting fast zombies they did comparatively little damage, and they went down very quickly under suppressive fire. However, even with his vast battle experience, the howls, moans and screams of any kind of zombie, leaper or normal, never failed to freak him out.

He'd gotten control of his fears (and bowels) long ago, however. Fear was the ultimate enemy in combat. He was still somewhat scared, alright, but he could still function while being frightened.

The squad leader was impressed with John. The exterminators prided themselves as having better skills than teams all over the world. Sure, they were good, but far from the best. The two "borrowed" operators, however, were extremely experienced.

Watching the sheer amount of lead from John's M249 transform a fast zombie into hamburger, he fired his MP7 and Desert Eagle simultaneously into three approaching zombies, then dove forward to avoid a kamikaze leaper, who smashed into the tiles behind him, screaming.

The SWAT operator's SOCOM at close range made short work of it; he holstered it and went back to spraying rounds at oncoming zombies. A leaper in front of him screamed, and was about to spring, when it literally exploded in a mass of flying flesh and gore, splattering Headshot.

"Sorry, sir," Kesenai sheepishly said, but Headshot detected the amusement in his voice.

"That's the last leaper," Headshot broadcasted the message. "There's a lull. Status and ammunition check."

The reports came streaming in, rather slowly.

"Dargon reporting in, sir. Health at 92 percent, 68 rounds of 5.56mm ammo, nine 12-gauge shells and three fragmentation grenades remaining, sir."

"sYn reporting in, sir. Health at 94 percent, 52 rounds of 7.62mm ammo and five fragmentation grenades remaining, sir."

"Kesenai reporting in, sir. Health at 95 percent, 27 rounds of 12.7mm ammo and five fragmentation grenades remaining, sir. Partner appears to be alive and feisty."

So Dargon'd been hit by a leaper and a mawman, the nickname for the normal zombie. Kesenai had been hit by a mawman, and sYn by a leaper, twice.

It was times like these that Headshot truly appreciated the technological work of art that was the FLAMBERGE Armor. Using sensors under the armor plating, pressure pads would calculate how close one was from death, and indicate it on a heads-up display in the suit interface.

Nodding his approval, Headshot turned his attention to the battle.

"We'll need to find the few remaining zombies that need to be eliminated. With any luck, we can find the zombified SWAT operators and then haul rear outta here," he said. "Search every place for any sign of alien life, and eliminate it."

"Remember, we can't afford to leave any sign of us here. The media will come after us, and the last thing we need is the military and government on our backs."

"Team Beta, continue to patrol the third level. Gamma, scout on the

second, and Alpha will handle the ground floor. Move out!"

* * *

>(Team Gamma)<p><p>

Dargon held his CAR-15 loosely in one hand, while drawing one of his two knives. He flipped it casually into a stabbing position, blade facing downwards. He brushed past a few clothesracks, and flicked his suit's flashlight on.

Bathed in the pool of light, was a prostrate zombie, not stirring. Aiming the light elsewhere, the rifleman found that there were at least five more in the vicinity. And if they were to revive...

Dargon knelt and plunged his knife unhesitantly into the zombie's head. It gave a brief scream, then fell limp, the headcrab sliding off. And what was underneath that was almost too hideous to see.

He looked away from the bloodied face that was frozen in a silent scream, now with a knife wound in the forehead. Crossing the room, he repeated the process with another zombie. However, as he got to the third one, it grunted.

The rifleman froze, bringing his carbine up to bear. The zombie shifted its weight, and unsteadily got to its feet, only to be killed by a burst from the Colt.

Wailing came from behind him, and he swung around, his CAR-15 blazing away. The unfortunate undead were cut down by the stream of fire, and they never moved again.

Four steady shots came from the other direction, and there was the staccato of small-caliber pistol shots being fired.

sYn came striding solemnly amongst the assorted clothes hanging on racks, some stained with blood that no amount of detergent could remove.

It was morbid, the rifleman wondered, but they wouldn't need to worry about their business any more they were dead.

He watched the sniper take a short-sleeved shirt off one of the hangers. "Hey, think this would fit me?" she asked jokingly.

Dargon smiled. "Yeah, it would, but I don't think that bloodstain would really go."

sYn looked down at it. It was quite a mess, a plain blue shirt splashed with brown and red, and the occasional streak of sickly yellowish green.

"I guess you're right," she chuckled. "Not to mention it'd smell pretty darn bad."

Laughing, Dargon quickly stopped when there was a low, almost fluting noise from behind him. Warily, he turned, and it quickly escalated into a high-pitched scream. Both exterminators raised their weapons instinctively.

Leapers!

Or was it? It had seemed quite a lot lower than what normal fast zombies' calls, and it wasn't nearly as high either. Fast zombies' wailing only crescendoed when they were attacking, and by now they should be feeling the rush of wind...

A footstep, unsteady and heavy, moved towards them. It gave the impression of staggering, then a stop in an attempt to regain balance. Dargon listened closely. He was the best at this kind of thing, listening and looking for clues.

If the footstep was unsteady, it was either wounded or had a heavy weight on it. Might be a normal zombie, but not a leaper, which moved silently. But if it had a heavy weight on it, maybe it was severely wounded in the upper regions, like the torso, or the head...

But a zombie wouldn't have survived something that serious. A severe injury to the head, and the thing would die. A severe injury to the torso would just make the 'crab jump off'.

A heavy weight, and a severe wound... not human. They would have died from a lethal wound...

Dargon visibly paled. He was unsure, but he had to clarify.

sYn looked at him in concern. "What's going on?"

He didn't respond, instead looking straight ahead, and increasing the light intensity on his suit's flashlight. He tried to focus that pool of light on that target area... Ah, yes. Right in front. Dargon squinted...

What was illuminated in the beam was proof enough for him.

The rifleman turned to sYn, who stepped back several paces, horrified, her rifle hanging loosely in one hand. He gestured violently towards the inviting exit, quickly slinging his rifle over his shoulder.

"Run. Now!"

* * *

>(Team Alpha)<p><p>

They'd found relatively little alien threats; a few shots eliminated the undead resistance that they had encountered. It was almost getting mundane, but John was particularly interested in the fallen zombies.

"That's what I was like when I first took up this job," Headshot remarked, as John stooped to scrutinize another zombie. "I was fascinated, yet terrified by these creatures. It's hard to kill them, but if you have the mentality that they aren't human any more, there won't be much opposition from your conscience."

John nodded, his eyes still on the corpse in front of him. "What amazes me is that you guys are so incredibly skilled, yet you're only

teenagers. How long have you been training?"

"Roughly three to four years," the squad leader said, shrugging. "We're quite strict in practice, so we have the opportunity to do work, and improve at the same time. We go to school, all right, but we miss most of the jobs on weekdays."

"You people live the good life," John said admiringly. "But how do these things actually get here?"

Headshot hesitated.

"It's a long story," he said finally, rubbing his hands. "What we still don't know, however, is why all of these creatures are aggressive. The planet that they come from must be one heck of a"

Dargon's strained voice came over the headset, cutting him off. "Sir! We need immediate assistance! We've got a toxic over here, I repeat, a toxic!"

Kesenai was obviously incredulous, judging by his tone. "Toxic?"

John was about to ask what a "toxic" was, but Dargon screamed over the headset:

"Yes, a poison zombie, nitwit!"

"Roger that, Dargon. Moving to your position," Headshot said quickly, sprinting towards the no-longer-functional escalators. "Beta, you heard him! Move out!"

"You got it, sir," Kesenai replied, and Headshot saw him rounding the corner across from where sYn and Dargon were. "I'll stay here."

Team Alpha pounded up the steps and dove into the darkened departmental store, where Headshot detected the muzzle flashes and gunfire. He dropped to one knee and moved, in a half-crouch, towards their position.

"John," he said, without looking back, "use that SAW of yours to distract it. We've got to lure it out, where the snipers can take care of it."

The SWAT operator nodded his affirmative and strafed to the side, then fired a burst at the huge lumbering form.

He couldn't see it very clearly, but he noticed a mass of what seemed like severe acne, or huge boils on the zombie's torso and head. It was amazing how it could still stand under that entire mass of writhing parasites. It was as bloated as he thought it would be, but he didn't expect there to be about seven headcrabs on the thing. The video had only shown four, but he reasoned that the entire team had been firing on it.

Dargon noticed him and gestured wildly at a lump on the floor beside him, so in between potshots, John made his way over to the rifleman.

The other sniper (ah, yes, her name was sYn) was leaning heavily against the counter. The body of a mottled green headcrab was a few centimetres from her, seven smoking holes in its body.

She'd been bitten, he realised grimly.

"Go," Dargon said, slotting another shell into the Remington 670. "I'll distract it. Take her where it's safe. She'll recover, but it's gonna be real slow."

He hesitated, not liking the thought of Headshot and Dargon attempting to hold the zombie off.

"_Go!_" the exterminator yelled, pulling the trigger. "It's weakening anyway, we'll be fine!"

John hoisted her up (gosh, that armor was heavy) and made his way to the rectangle of light.

But as soon as he was outside he realised that he should have stayed for just a while longer, because there was a cry of anger, pain, then silence.

* * *

>Headshot flipped the select-fire switch on his rifle, ready to goad the troublemaker to the exit.<p><p>

He'd heard Dargon get bitten by a toxic headcrab, but since he'd dispatched it, the squad leader figured that his comrade would be safe for the time being. Or so he hoped.

The zombie was closer, and it was bleeding from all the wounds it had sustained. Only two headcrabs were stil clinging like barnacles to its body, and he figured the odds were pretty against the zombie.

Plus, Kesenai had a slug ready to put into its ugly head, once he got it outside.

It was even closer now, and it had stopped, hesitating before the light. Understandable. It had been shrouded in darkness for the past half-hour or so. It was perfectly logical.

Fascinating, yet...

Deadly. And it was a threat to be taken care of.

Headshot pulled the trigger, almost relishing the zombie's screams.

* * *

>Kesenai peered through the 10-times zoom. The team's preferred method for dispatching poison zombies was either a fragmentation grenade, which was tough, because zombies tended to hurl objects back, or to goad it out to where he or sYn could see it, then they would fill its head with lead.<p><p>

But when he saw John dragging a limp sYn out, he knew he'd have to do

this one on his own.

And there was Headshot, sprinting out as well... but where was Dargon?

If the zombie came out, Dargon was dead, or unconscious.

If the zombie was still inside, Dargon was doomed to die, but still alive.

He didn't have time to calculate the odds, because the giant stumbled out into the light.

* * *

>It was over in less than a second it had just melted away as soon as it came out, the thick slug going right into its brain. Definitely dead. Hell, its head had come straight off, the headcrabs shredded by a hail of rounds.<p><p>

The exterminators moved like ants; not towards the zombie, but past it. Looking for Dargon. sYn was still trying to get to her feet, but she went with them anyway.

Kesenai and Stewart waited for what seemed like ages, but eventually, dazed but still alive, the rifleman came out with the rest of the team. The mission was pretty much over. All they had to do was find the bodies of...

"Aw, crap," Kesenai groaned.

It was digging time.

* * *

>The exterminators gathered at their van. They looked like teenagers again, with their sweat-streaked faces, and armor stripped off. It was a tradition to do a recount of the mission's events at the end of every one. But in this case, it was a rather messy recount.<p><p>

"Some milk run, Headshot, I almost died."

"Well excuse me! How was I supposed to know that there was a toxic somewhere in the mall?"

"I want you to know, Kesenai, that I'm not going to clean your armor for you."

"Don't blame me if I end up spoiling something while doing so."

"Why should I? It's your armor."

They stopped as Deputy McPherson stepped up, clearing his throat.
"Well, kids"

"Kids?" sYn raised an eyebrow.

The deputy looked nervous again, but he continued. "Thanks for helping us clear out the area, and I hope my men were helpful. Like

you requested, we didn't contact the press, and we'd like to thank you with"

"No plaque or medal for us, thanks," Headshot said. "We'd rather have, uhm, well, you know..."

"Yes?" the officer asked curiously.

"If there's anything we want, it's money. This is our job, you know..." Headshot said uncomfortably, shifting his weight from one foot to another. "If you don't mind..."

Four metallic clicks were heard, and the deputy suddenly noticed that all the team members' holsters were empty and that they were standing with both hands behind their backs. And each of them had Cheshire-style grins on their faces. Very evil ones at that.

Requests are tough things to ask indeed. For them to have any impact... you gotta deliver them right.

* * *

>Chapter 4 is done! I'm sorry for the delay, guys, I really am. I kept rewriting the chapter, and I apologize if the ending was a bit rushed, since I was trying to complete this in time for sYn's birthday.<p><p>

Meatwad, Medico, Reaper and Artemis will show up in the next chapter. Don't worry... with any luck this'll be up before half a year, like this one was. Sorry if the format's changed. QuickEdit is screwing around.

Happy birthday, sYn! She's been a lot of encouragement and a faithful reviewer. Thanks! -hug- Hope this is a good enough birthday present for someone like you.

End
file.